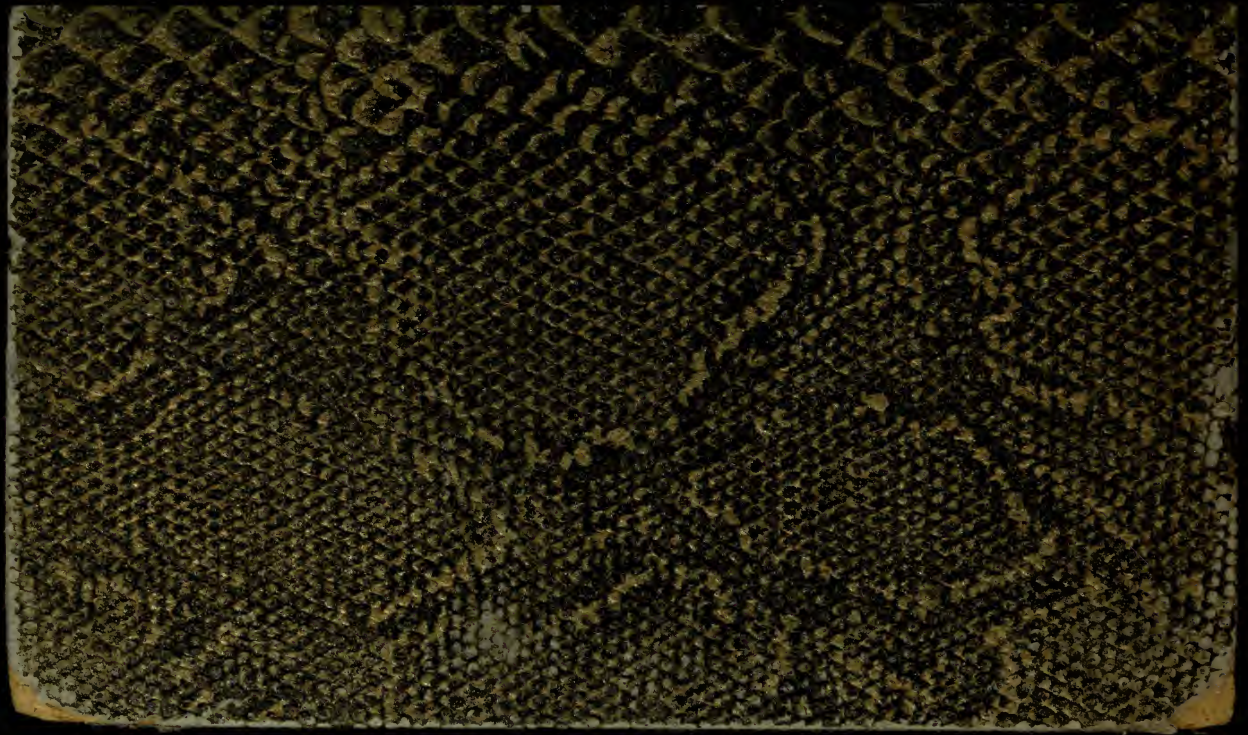

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THE SMILING FACES

THE SMILING FACES

And Other Stories

BY

BRINSLEY MACNAMARA

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To Albert Parsons Sachs

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Look at the Heffernans!

I

One might have thought of the expression as leaping somewhat irrelevantly to the mind of the hearer, when it stood detached, or when it was clapped up against other words in the very middle of a conversation. Although it seemed to hold the graphic quality of all the speech of Garradrimna, one did not think of it as being exceptionally striking until one began to observe its immediate and rather powerful effect upon the person to whom it was addressed. . . . Ah, then one began to feel that there was a deep meaning securely

embedded in what had sounded at first as a little casual jumble of three short words and some people's name—" Look at the Heffernans ! "

One heard the " word," as they called it, so often in Garradrimna, and was compelled to observe so many startling exhibitions of its varying effect upon those to whom it was spoken, that, as a stranger to all the inhibitions of the place, one felt that there was nothing for it but to allay one's wonderment by inquiring as best one might. . . . And in Garradrimna, one soon found that it was most productive of information to inquire through the exercise of silent, but constant curiosity ; by the development, which came rather easily here, of a sort of listening habit of one's whole consciousness. One soon found, for instance, that the " word "

was always spoken in the same connection, no matter how varied the immediate circumstances. And this connection was inevitably one which held a certain excitement for Garradrimna—the interest in marriage. For was not the question of marriage bound up with the anxious intensity of domestic discussion where all the more beautiful emotions were subdued to financial considerations? Here it was "Look at the Heffernans!" Was not the matter of marriage delicately mentioned, all thought of money subdued to the rich sound of lyric whisperings, between lovers wandering over dew-wet fields, while the moon rose up in a lilac sky? There it was, "Look at the Heffernans!"

So ubiquitous did they sometimes appear even as an unknown quantity, that one

clutched at a hope that perhaps the Heffernans were, after all, merely of more or less mediocre notability, a local "family," "grandees," "quality," Garradrimna's "word" of them always being merely, to its shame, an exhibition of the last lingering traces of old feudal slavishness. . . . One's ears waited anxiously for further words in this connection, which might be spoken by any mother to any daughter: "I'm surprised at you, so I am, for being such a hussy. Look at the grand lady-like ways of Miss Euphemia Heffernan, or Miss Victoria Heffernan, or Miss Genevieve Heffernan!" (as their names might be). But the words, which might, quite definitely, have shown the Heffernans, somehow never came to be spoken. And one never heard such "words" as

" Look at the Flynns ! " or " Look at the Fitzsummonses ! " or " Look at the Culligans of Clonabroney ! " Oh, no. Whenever one was bidden to " Look at " any one around Garradrimna it was always " at the Heffernans."

So, after all one's listening, the Heffernans still belonged to the acoustic rather than to the optic sense. They were people to be heard of, rather than to be seen, yet notable people had ever made themselves present to at least both these senses. . . . Therefore, the puzzle of the Heffernans developed with one's curiosity, until at last there was really nothing for it but to see the Heffernans.

II

It was rather a job to find them, because, for a family who enforced themselves so

powerfully upon Garradrimna, their dwelling-place was undistinguished—just a small thatched house, hidden deep in the nest of fields which fell down from Annus Hill, upon the Castleconnor Road. . . . Indeed, it was nothing short of cruel disappointment to stand upon the hill and look down upon the little holding of the Heffernans. It was not much to "look at." As a matter of fact, it appeared even less prosperous than the other small "places" around it, as if blighted, in a way, by some sudden sorrow that had sprung, perhaps, from its own native quality, its power over Garradrimna, which had emptied it of its substance, reminding one of some old hermit with a spell or a cure, who might be found living neglected in a poor cabin in the mountains. . . . But, of course, one thought hopefully,

there were still the people who lived here, the famous Heffernans. It was easily possible that these might fulfil one's well-developed expectations. But if one sense of the Heffernans fell upon Garradrimna, another fell upon the listener in Garradrimna. It had already, for him, effected an almost complete transformation in meaning of the verb "to look." He felt that he merely wanted to see the Heffernans, having been asked to look, and feeling quite unable to keep himself from looking, while all the rest, the young gallants, the maidens fair, were asked to look, but not, as he suspected, in quite the same way. Ah, yes, one must really come to know the Heffernans, those inhabitants, whoever they might be, who walked in and out of this little house, or else sat upon low stools by the fire when

the nights were long. . . . Aye, one might know them, but would that be "seeing" in any real sense, for was not the heart of another a dark forest, as the Russian proverb had it, and a pity beyond all telling was deep to the soul of the glimpse that one might steal. . . . It was better, then, to descend from Annus Hill as one went down from some high hill of dreaming, unfamiliar and unfulfilled. . . . Maybe it were better far that one did not come to know the Heffernans. . . .

Yet curiosity, which remained to urge, was one of the lusts of clay, and, when once one had begun to listen, one must be always listening, catching anxiously at every word that might help to identify, to realise. And as one grew almost insensibly into the life of the place,

became, in a way, quite Garradrimnian, one heard words falling in plenty now, depressing murmurs, seeing that one no longer wished to hear because one no longer wished to see. . . .

III

And so here were the Heffernans! An elderly unmarried family, and maybe that was all. But as one knew them now, one had to be looking at them always, turning them over in one's mind, endeavouring to discover their meaning, if meaning they held, or any sense at all. One thought first of Padna, the eldest. He had had a hard life of it on the bit of land. Soon he would be an old man, still working, maybe, on the bit of land, and, no matter how one might think of bachelorhood in the conventional,

sarcastical sense, there would certainly be more sorrow than joy in the thought that he had not married. . . . To see him working lonely in the fields. . . . The second and third strangest things about him, beyond his late, unwedded state, were his fondness for weddings and his fondness for children. In all the barony of Garradrimna, no wedding had ever been known to forgather without Paudheen Heffernan, as he was called, in friendliness, in such places. There he would be, sitting in a secluded corner, with a stiff, high collar on him and a puce tie, letting great bursts of laughter out of him just as if richly enjoying the whole thing. . . . He would often walk long, lonely miles on a Sunday to see a young child that had just begun to " take notice." And there he would be running around

the room upon his hands and knees, barking like a dog and letting on to be wicked, while the child might be crowing pleasantly, or else developing hysterics, to the delight or consternation of its mother . . . while there was nothing before Paudheen but the long miles home to the little lonely house beneath the hill. . . .

Many a girl he had courted "strong," as they said, had gone to America, only to find him upon her return a great many years later with hair gone a good way further back upon his forehead and the old glint becoming more dimmed in his eye. . . .

"Gee, Pad Heffernan! And you're not married yet?"

"The devil a marry. Ah, sure, I'm time enough, Mary Anne." (Or Peg,

or Massie, or Brigid, as their names might be).

And although he would attempt his old, big laugh, it would sound but poorly to the girl, a thin "Ha! Ha!" like that of any imperfect gossoon of Garradrimna. . . .

Then there was Ellen, the daughter of the celebrated family. She was somewhat more complex than Paudheen, as perhaps befitted her sex. And, indeed, there were some who would say that she was the axle, as it were, upon which the whole twisted wheel of fortune of the Heffernans turned. She had been very good-looking a great many years before. But her beauty was like one of the many things that belonged to "the good old times," a thing that had been of yore. And thus it was, perhaps, that in Garradrimna they called her "Ellen

Yore." Now it was most remarkable, in the neighbourhood of Garradrimna, to meet the phenomenon of an old maid without peevishness, yet it was notable, that Ellen was quite without this quality, for, instead of being against the idea of marriage all around her, she almost wildly encouraged it amongst her friends and neighbours, often making herself the means of rushing a young couple into about the maddest marriage that ever was seen. And even when girls, with whom she had no more reason to be friendly than the fact that she had gone to school with their mothers, went and got married, she visited them with grand congratulations in her mouth.

The next of the Heffernans was Loughlin, the second son. And many thought that through him, there was still hope of

the Heffernans in the line of matrimony. He was exactly like what Paudheen had been about twenty years earlier, a great fellow with the girls, and constantly in love. " Loughy Heffernan, the lad in love," they used to call him for a long time, but this rather lengthy title came to be shortened to " Loughy Love." And thus it stood, and seemed likely to stand, as long as Garradrimna remained enormously interested in the Heffernans. Sometimes, the whole three of them would take " a curious figario," as it was said, and go off to enjoy themselves from the little house beneath the hill ; Paudheen to sit quiet and ever quieter at weddings, or else dandle the strangers' babies upon his knee ; " Ellen Yore " to wish joy to some newly-married pair ; " Loughy Love " to dance the new, fine boots nearly off his

feet at some other dance, where he would be bound to fall in love with a fresh girl. . . .

IV

Seeing that they were now such an extraordinary family, it must have taken some extraordinary causes to produce them. . . . But in Garradrimna, when once they began to tell, they told everything.

The whole trouble had begun with Ellen. When their mother, Alice, died, leaving them under the care of their father, Peter, there was no one could or would attempt to deny the usefulness of Ellen about the house. They wanted a woman to look after them anyway, the three men. But, of course, the wife of Paudheen, if he had one, would

be quite as useful to them, and he was just now at, if not actually past, the marriageable age. Paudheen began to give out loud hints to his father, and the father, in turn, began to give out loud hints to Ellen. . . . Ellen did not seem to notice in the least, nor did she show any inclination to hurry herself out of the place to make room for Paudheen's woman, whoever she might be. So Peter himself was forced to take it in hand then, and he began to cast his eye around for a suitable match for Ellen. . . . He exerted himself thus in secret for many months, searching, sifting, conniving, planning. . . . He was most excited with himself. If he managed this it would certainly be something for a man to have managed, the getting of a man to please Ellen, seeing that she had, so far, made no attempt to

please herself. . . . And soon, begad, she might be easy enough to please . . . when it would be too late. So one fine May morning he ran home very excited, out of Garradrimna fair. He nearly frightened the life out of Ellen as he leaped in before her upon the floor where she was just washing up the breakfast things.

"I have him, I have him!" he cried.

"Have what, father?" said Ellen, almost surprised out of her senses.

"A man for you, at last. Be the Holy Farmer!"

"Thank you!" she said, becoming indignant immediately.

But her father, poor man, being in such a state of excitement, quite misunderstood. He sat down upon one of the low stools to say out his say:

"And something like a job I had to get

him, I can tell you, but he was worth the trouble, Ignatius Crinnion, that'll take you without a ha'penny fortune, he says, and sure that'll suit Paudheen down to the ground. His heart, God help us, is stuck upon marrying for love, the poor unfortunate fellow, and I suppose it would be wrong for us to strive to prevent him. I have no fortune to give, barring the one he might bring in, which, as you see, will be none in that case."

Ellen's arms had become folded while he was speaking. But now, with one tense, sudden movement, they drove swiftly to her sides, her eyes blazed wildly, and the words burst from her :

" And is it one of them sort you think me, father ? Can it be a fact ? And I a believer in love, and I an instigator of love ! And all the happy, young, smiling

married pairs ! And all the merry innocent little childer ! And I responsible like for them all. And it's what you want to go sell me now like a scraggy heifer in Garradrimna fair to Ignatius Crinnion, and he a baste of a man ! Oh, gracious, gracious ! And oh, father ! My heart is broke, my heart is broke. And this'll be the death of me ! "

There was nothing left for poor old Peter but to hurry out of the house. He met Paudheen, who had been waiting patiently in the yard for the result of the interview.

" Well, what did she say ? I suppose it's all right now, and that she was only mad to lep at the chance of having him."

" All right, is it ? " almost screeched the old man. " Go in there and have a look at her roaring her eyes out, and you'll

soon see whether it is all right or not! The very same as yourself, Paudheen, God help me with the two of yous, she can't marry either, only for love!"

However, the rather hopeless situation seemed to brighten a little as time went on. Ellen was not altogether intractable, possibly, after her love for Paudheen, because she did not wish to spoil the reputation she had already won as an encourager of marriage. She told her brother that she was not wishful to stand in his way of marrying any girl who might have struck his fancy. She put it straight to him:

"It does not matter at all about the fortune, Paudh, so long as the other thing is in it."

"What thing?" he demanded rather sharply, not altogether satisfied.

"The love, what else?"

There was something that miraculously mollified him in the very sound of the word "love," and he permitted her to proceed without further question.

"Sure what fortune d'ye want to be looking for anyway, even if you were one of them kind, which, thanks be to God, you're not, for the girl, no matter who she is, won't think bad of me, for I'm affectionate and full of love, and sure yous'll both be glad to have me anyway for looking after the childer."

Indeed the whole situation appeared decidedly promising now, and, in conversation with Paudheen, old Peter stopped in the very middle of his chuckling over it to remember "Loughy Love," whom both had almost forgotten in their jubilation. . . . He was the only

difficulty now, but a big difficulty. . . . If only he could be induced to marry into a place . . . and he a fine butt of a man as they said, who could work well, and be very suitable for any comfortable girl. . . .

He was more or less the pet of the family, so they felt that it would not be nice to say anything that would hurt his feelings . . . but it had to be done. . . . He did not exactly turn upon them savagely, but he spoke out his mind.

"Ah-ha! So that's your game, is it? Wanting me to ruin my life, mebbe, by marrying not for love. Besides that, I'm in love, so I am, with nearly every nice girl I ever seen, and so, even if it was wanting me to marry for love yous were itself, I'd never be able to make up my mind to take any girl, for fear I'd make an

everlasting mistake by taking the wrong one. . . . D'ye see now?"

The absolute hopelessness into which the situation had now so swiftly returned upon this declaration from "Loughy Love" soon hurried old Peter into his grave, a guiltless casualty of the power of love. . . .

They continued to live on together, Paudheen, "Ellen Yore," and "Loughy Love," in the little lonely place beneath the Hill of Annus upon the Castleconnor Road. Outwardly they were happy enough, going their different ways as of old, doing all those little things which brought them joy.

Yet there were many, who often wondered what thoughts they must be having with themselves, as they went in and out of the little house, or else sat upon low

stools by the fire when the nights were long. . . .

V

So, now that one knew all this, one had come almost to know the meaning of the Heffernans to Garradrimna. . . . Their glory, maybe, in the thing they were above any other family, but, perhaps, not fully the pity and the beauty of the Heffernans. This matter of seeing and hearing was such an amazing complication. For, while engaged upon the task of seeing the Heffernans through listening, through questioning, one had been blind to a certain definite movement of life in Garradrimna. If Dublin had been famous aforetime as "the car-drivingest city in Europe," Garradrimna was rapidly qualifying to be "the most marrying place in

Ireland." Its fame in this regard, had already overflowed the Midlands, and, in most distant places, when the matrimonial possibilities of a girl or a man were beginning to be considered doubtful, it was said, as a word of comfort, "Begad, he'll have to face Garradrimna!" or "Begad, she'll have to face Garradrimna!" And these eternal springs of hope were all the making of the Heffernans. Look at the Heffernans! It was not for nothing that Garradrimna had been so insistent upon this "word." . . . It had got what it wanted out of this lonely family, for the Heffernans had made themselves martyrs in a quiet sense; their message and their monument being embodied in the word that Garradrimna spoke of them continuously as the means to its end. Garradrimna had thought well to make

them what it called " an example." And it seemed likely that they would remain " an example " for all time. Even when they were dead and gone it would still be " Look at the Heffernans ! " This was the glory of the Heffernans. But the pity of the Heffernans. Ah, yes, indeed, the pity of the Heffernans. . . . That little " place " that one could see from Annus Hill ! One looked first upon all the other " places " about it and found that some sense of protection lingered around them, as of life as it should always be, enclosed in arms all soft with fondness, children playing around well-kept houses, with geraniums in the windows. But nothing like this around their " place." It seemed to know no kindly hand of shelter from the world. It was like a wind-swept place upon the edge of Lone-

liness. Surely the disturbing spectacle of all the marriages for which they were responsible must make them think so often of marriage as the years went by, and many dark, blank moments of anger must have come to them because of their unwedded state. . . .

Yet there remained the intimate gesture of the way of their lives, which went to prove that their purpose was, maybe, far other than any attempt selfishly to connect themselves with happiness. There were still the weddings and babies for Paudheen, the words of incitement and encouragement before and after marriages for "Ellen Yore," the futile fallings into and out of love for Loughy. . . . But their purpose was not difficult or far to seek. . . . For often, as a loving couple wandered over the Hill of Annus, so warm

in their dream, the girl would lean her brown head upon the young man's shoulder and say :

" Look at the Heffernans ! "

" Aye, look at them, indeed ! "

" It's terrible strange about them. It's funny they never married ! "

" How funny it is ? You surely wouldn't want to go make ' Ellen Yore ' out of your little me. Now would you ? "

" Oh, begad no, nor Paudheen, nor ' Loughy Love ' out of myself. No, fear."

" I suppose we ought to begin to think of getting married then . . . as soon as we can . . . what do you think . . . ?

Thus, in this moment, would the unmarried family have enforced their unconscious purpose. And this was the beauty of the Heffernans.

VI

With all the frequent and hurried business of marriage around one, one so soon began to feel a great loneliness overtaking the single man in Garradrimna. One found oneself strangely moved by the laughter of girls in the dusk. . . . One found oneself glancing in distraction upon gorgeous girls in muslin frocks on summer roads. . . . Oh, what was it at all? Oh, what? . . . Was Garradrimna Journey's End? Great silences fell around one; great words were bursting on one's ears:

"O mistress mine, where are you roaming?
O, stay and hear; your true love's coming,
That can sing both high and low:
Trip no further, pretty sweeting;
Journeys end in lovers meeting,
Every wise man's son doth know.

What is love ? 'Tis not hereafter ;
Present mirth hath present laughter ;
What's to come is still unsure :
In delay there lies no plenty ;
Then come kiss me, sweet-and-twenty,
Youth's a stuff will not endure."

And soon *she* was walking by one's side, up Annus Hill . . . and down again . . . through the melodious morning of life and time. . . . Ah, goodness me ! The things that are to be. Whoever would have dreamt of it—in Garradrimna. Yet, sure it was not Garradrimna at all, but the Heffernans. . . . There was nothing wrong with Garradrimna now. . . For at last, just exactly as one should, after the fashion of all the rest, one had " looked at the Heffernans."

The Smiling Faces

I

THERE were so many, in her time, who had come and sat in the same way in her bar that, for perhaps too long, Miss Cunningham was disinclined to regard too seriously the case of Thomas Weldon. It could not possibly be that he had his eye on herself, for although she was a well-to-do woman with this nice, thriving business, and two lovely farms, as well, on the outskirts of the village of Clunnen, no one ever thought that way of her now. . . . These possessions might easily have built up a certain sense of allurement

about her in the far-back past, but now she was old and quiet in herself, maintaining her grip upon life only, it would seem, by her constant and cautious attention to her business. It was the very reason, in a way, why she had come to notice particularly the case of Thomas Weldon, as she moved about her establishment continuously, talking to her customers, humouring them, concerned about them, even when it came to giving advice that might be a bit against herself sometimes.

Thomas Weldon had grown upon her of late, for he seemed to be always and ever sitting there by her counter now, talking to herself and Essie Kelch, the barmaid. If she ever had any notion of marrying herself, Thomas Weldon might easily have been the sort of man she would

have chosen. But the idea of her ever marrying ! Oh, not at all ! Never ! Yet he was a nice man still, a real settled sort of a man anyway until this, until he had begun to come here so often, for no other purpose, as it had suddenly appeared to her, than to talk the few timid words he customarily spoke to Essie Kelch while in her presence. Essie Kelch indeed ! A good attentive girl who brought a nice bit of custom here of an evening by her pleasant little way, but the idea of marrying Essie Kelch ! The cheek of these young ones nowadays anyway ! But she had spoken to her, quietly, which was her habit, yet with the right kind of meaning behind her words :

" I suppose he does be even trying to flirt with you, when there's no one else here, and I'm not in the bar ? "

" Oh, not at all, Miss Cunningham. Is it a man like him? Why, I'm sure he never even once thought of the like in his whole life."

She had watched most carefully after that, and had noticed several times how the quiet eyes of Thomas Weldon had strayed from her in eagerness, often while she was in the very middle of some of her most entertaining accounts of the secret histories of County Meath families, and became entangled in that curious network of a smile which would always seem to be gathered over the smiling face of Essie. . .

Ah, how well she had guessed?

If it had ever gone further than that, she firmly resolved that such occasions should not so easily present themselves for the future.

"But sure you all say that," said Essie.

"Who all? I never said it before, so I didn't," said Thomas Weldon, in his halting, heavy way, yet pleadingly.

"But the lads from Castleconnor and Mullaghowen and Garradrimna! Oh, many and many's the time I've heard it."

"And you used to be talking to all them lads like to me?"

"I used, what else?"

"D'ye tell me now?"

"D'ye think I'm eight years here and never spoke to a boy in my life? And they in and out here every second in the day. . . ."

A snatch of conversation like this would fall between them in the infrequent intervals between the appearance and the

disappearance of customers, and if Miss Cunningham chanced to be out of the bar for as long as a few seconds; and with this he had to be satisfied.

The end of the night that had held for him just such a little bit of magic would be the lonesome road home past the ruined archway at Clonarney, that was called "Smiling Bess," and which in other days he had not had the courage to pass on really dark nights, but he did not care now. . . . He could feel brave and forceful now. After the Road of the Elms there was the long boreen down to the neat house in his comfortable nest of fields. He could feel the softness of his rich land about him as he went into the lonely house and lit the candle. A woman would be lovely here. . . . Essie Kelch, for instance, would be lovely here. . . .

And so he would sit lonely with his thoughts until the night was nearly done and the dawn had come. But sure not one of Weldons had ever married like this. Indeed, in his own very family down all the years he had been waiting for his sisters to be settled, he had heard the word mentioned, heard them say of some wayward girl: "Well, bad luck to her smiling face anyway, and see how she got round him in the heel of the hunt!"

His own sisters had not been like that at all, but quiet, settled girls, even before they were properly settled, and so he had had to wait for what appeared a great length of time until they were off his hands, and it was this waiting, more than anything else, that had made him so timid, speaking no word to any girl, thinking of no girl

until now. . . . Only what would his sisters say, his severe and sedate and comfortably married sisters say to a "one" like that, a barmaid? Even long dead Weldons would turn in their graves. What good would she be for the wife of a farmer with the light ways in her after she being grinning across the counter at men all her life? Wouldn't anyone, living or dead, think he was mad entirely? They would, oh, they would! Begad, there was no use in making an eeget of a fellow's self altogether. . . .

But in the fields a few hours later, the smiling face of Essie would appear. Essie would seem to call him. The Weldons had ever been good farmers. They had brought these fields, these fields of his, to beauty, to lovely smiles on summer days, with which he had enriched his soul till

now, till SHE had come, with her face before him always, coming between him and the face of the fields. And all the tenderness he had aforetime given to the land. Ah, where was it now? Yet there was "something" all about him, in the trees and the quickening clay, in the wide stretch of the windy sky and over all the world.

But soon a brightness that was its own shadow, too, would have fallen for him upon the day, and he would be feeling that he must clean himself and hurry early into Clunnen this evening. . . . And it always took him such a long time now, the cultivation of his appearance. . . . In a way, it was harder work than when he had devoted himself to the land. . . .

III

" I don't like the way that poor man is goin' on at all. Setting his land on the ' eleven months system,' and letting his bit of oats rot with neglect, like the way he did last year."

Miss Cunningham was saying this to Essie now more than a year after she had first " noticed it."

" Oh, sure he's getting to be a rale ould eeget anyway. I don't know what's come over him. . . . If only he would say what seems to be in his mind itself. . . . But sitting there with his elbows on his knees always, and he thinking and brooding to himself. . . ."

" You shouldn't be taking much notice of him anyway."

" I won't, Miss Cunningham, and that's as sure as you're there."

After such a word out of Miss Cunningham's continuous and concerned mood of advice, Essie always tried to be as " cold " as she could, by keeping her face as much averted as possible when speaking to Thomas Weldon.

Ah, why was she doing that, he would think. If only she knew. . . . If only she could feel the sadness and then the fire that came into him whenever he heard her talking and laughing and skitting with lads from Castleconnor in the little sitting-room off the bar whither she had carried their drinks on a tray, and where he could not see her or them. For often he had heard her giggling richly in there. Oh, it was tearing him to pieces . . . murdering him !

That summer saw the almost complete neglect of his farm. But Miss Cunningham

could do nothing to stop it. He was quiet and harmless, never raising his voice in her house, never getting drunk, only safely, moodily, and with not a word out of him, his eyes quietly in pursuit of the laughing eyes of Essie. Oh, but he was going from bad to worse. It was said that he had his nice place mortgaged up to the hilt. He had become neglectful, even of his appearance, and, seeing him now, one would nearly laugh outright at the idea of connecting his name with that of little, laughing Essie.

He moved more moodily through autumn evenings, often feeling, as he passed by "Smiling Bess," that there could be a great cruelty, surely, in smiling faces, that maybe Essie, when she laughed in the bar, or in the sitting-room now, was maybe only laughing at him. . . . What

was it brought him such a feeling as he passed the sinister archway at Clonarney? The woman's head, so fantastically ornamented like the head of a Gorgoneion; what could it mean to him? Yet he could never pass it now without feeling some dread. . . . And still, strangely, on his homeward way, he would often return the road to repass it. Why was the thing doing this to him, with its smile like that of one who had led men to their doom in the days gone by?

One night that was darker than usual, and upon the occasion of such a return along the road to Clunnen, he stopped to search for the face of "Smiling Bess" through the gloom. This night, beyond all others, she had called him! And for what? He could scarcely see her. But, beyond the stillness of his troubled mind,

he heard the sound of suppressed laughter from one side of the archway. He could just see a confused group, but he knew what it was—a man with a girl in his arms. . . . Suddenly they seemed to have become aware of his presence. There was no sound at all. Above, the smiling face of Gorgoneion grinned on. It was Essie in someone's arms ! He could see their bicycles leaning against the other side of the archway. Oh, aye, it was one of the Castleconnor lads. . . . To think that he had let this happen !

And there, in that moment, the resolve to which, heretofore, he had been unable to summon himself was born. . . . He could not let it go over him another single day. He would tell her to-morrow. She did not know, the poor, little thing, that she had nearly ruined him. Surely she

must have guessed that the only "love" conversation he had ever had with her was a proposal. But she had not seen. He had "axed" her in his queer, timid way, and she had only shown by her conduct that she refused him—for the time being. But to-morrow he would tell her! He would tell her to-morrow. The long spell of his quietness would be broken, and she would know then how much. . . . how terrible big was his love for her. He would carry her home to his little neglected place in the fields, and all would be beautiful again . . . her smiling face . . . the smiling face of the fields.

But above him now, monstrous through the darkness, the face of "Smiling Bess." . . . He hurried away, that face in his eyes, and in his ears what he took to be the sound of laughter. . . .

IV

The next morning, he heard, the postman, or someone passing early out of Clunnen, had told him, that Miss Cunningham had passed peacefully away in the night-time. Ah, that was sad, the poor old thing!

He went into Clunnen, as he had purposed, only to find, in the natural course, that "Miss Cunningham's" was closed and shuttered. And for three days, until the funeral, he went into Clunnen, but never into one of the other houses. They might say what they liked of him! They would know now that he was no drunkard, but only one with lovely feelings always.

He saw Essie at the funeral, in a little black hat that suited her, crying over Miss Cunningham's grave. And he cried too.

A nice woman, Miss Cunningham ! She had never said a word to him, although he must have been more or less disgusting to her, sitting there, day in, day out. And he felt this of her now, although she had prevented him from "axing" Essie properly. . . . But to think that he must wait longer, now that he had at last made up his mind. . . . Yet he waited, waited in patience, his great resolve still further exciting him, until the shop opened again, and, in the temporary employment of the executors of the late Miss Cunningham, Essie appeared as usual in the bar.

He was again standing looking at her, saying polite and sympathetic things about the departed. . . . But the words were rushing upon him now, after the silent years. . . . When would she give up speaking about the virtues of Miss

Cunningham so that he might decently tell her? . . . But, even still, she was saying things that he had not the heart to interrupt, the kindliest things about Miss Cunningham.

He had not spoken to a soul since her death, so immersed had he been in his tremendous resolve. He had not heard the rumour that, as a reward for her faithful services, Miss Cunningham had willed Essie the house and the two farms, and a considerable sum of money. Yet even if he had heard of it, the full significance of such news might not have dawned on him.

At long last, when Essie began to speak of other things, he had the opportunity. And the words burst from him, a long-pent-up stream. . . . He scarcely knew what he said, but he asked her surely to

marry him over and over again. . . . He said all the lovely things to her that he had wanted to say for so long.

" How well you never came to ask me until now ? " she said. " Think of all the years I have spent here slaving, when I'd have loved to get out of it and be mistress of my own place. And you spent and spent, wasting and wasting, coming in here. And now to think that you have the cheek to ask me when you have everything spent, and when you know well that I'm coming in for this place and the two farms, and any amount of money. . . . ! "

His very face looked speechless as he stared at her bewildered :

" Ah, no, I never heard, not a word, I never heard, not a single word, and that's as sure as you're there."

" Ah, you never heard ? Do you think I'll believe that for a story ? And isn't that why you're asking me to marry you now, and for no other reason at all ? "

" Ah, no, it isn't. It isn't surely."

And then he spoke of it no more. . . . There fell a great quietness upon his mind, a quiet like of old, before he had begun to come here. Let her think of him what she liked ! Her words were hard, and she did not understand. He felt now that she might never be able to understand. . . So where was the use ? He was trembling as he stood there by his drink at the counter. She was not the same girl now. Oh, no, nor never again. . . .

" Don't you know well I'm engaged to that Castleconnor lad anyway ? "

He knew now, of course, and then he

did not seem to want to know, for he remained dead silent. He seemed to remain a long time there imprisoned in himself, until he was roused by hearing, from beyond what seemed a great distance, Essie laughing in the sitting-room. . . . It was the very same as the laughter he had heard by the archway of "Smiling Bess." The Castleconnor lad was in there with her now, and they were going to be married. . . .

He was already in the moment of his second great resolve. . . . Ah, yes. It was the thing that should be done, the right thing now. He moved towards the door of the room, surprised the while how easy it was to do this now. . . .

"Excuse me," he said, walking right in and surprising Essie upon the young man's knee, "but I was going

home, and it's how I didn't like to go without wishing yous a great dale of joy. . . ."

He did not know whether he had shaken hands with the young man or not, or how he had left the room, for already he was out of the house and far down the road. It did not seem so hard to pass the face of "Smiling Bess" now, for it appeared that it might be a long time before he should pass it in the day-time or dark again. He was going like some truant lover towards his own fields now. But would they understand? Maybe they would understand. The dumbness that had been upon him, and the waiting and waiting, until he had lost. He would be always telling them of that now until maybe they might smile once more.

This, surely was, his third and more

certain resolve—to make them smile again. . . .

But he had wasted himself and them. He was not the man he had been, nor were they the fields the Weldons had left him.

. . . Make then smile again. . . . If they broke into laughter at him altogether, what kind of laughter must it be ?

That would be his life now, he thought, to prevent this from coming. He must hold himself and give himself to that battle. The people would laugh at him, maybe, but the fields. . . . Ah, no, they could never have the heart to do it. But he had thought the same way once of Essie. . . . And yet . . . and yet, because of her, the fields were lovelier and kindlier than ever before.

It was her face still that he saw in them,

and maybe she would never . . . never laugh at him again.

And if that could be, then "Smiling Bess" might hold no terror for him any more.

The Sisters

I

WHENEVER I remember the sisters, I see them always in the evening sitting in their quiet cottage by the lakeside. There could never be any question about the love of the sisters for one another, because about the time they were laying the foundations of their story I knew them well, and so came to have knowledge of the beautiful things they had done for one another, the constancy of one, I thought, being but a reflection of the constancy of the other. Indeed, so rich and fine was the sympathy into which their

beings flowed that, frequently, I was forced to think of them as one person. The elder was called Rachel, the younger, Rebecca, and one of the few things about them that I never quite came to know was just why the names of women in the Bible had been chosen for their names, unless perhaps someone of their family had had foreknowledge that these two daughters of their people were destined to link those names again with all that is beautiful, and noble in womanhood. And yet this thought did not immediately strike me when I met Rebecca, who was the first of the sisters I came to know. She was then living away from her sister in another part of the country, and she told me she was very lonely.

"Oh, I'm so lonely without Rachel," she said, "so awfully, dreadfully lonely."

It was not for me, a stranger to all the implications of her life, suddenly to feel how much her sister meant to her, yet I remember now that I was considerate, and listened with attention until she had told me more :

" If only you knew Rachel, the poor thing, you would see exactly what I mean and feel about her exactly as I do."

Then she went on to tell me how much, or, at least, to signify as best she might, all that her sister meant in her life. It seemed to me a very beautiful affection which superseded even sisterhood.

" This," said I to myself, " is something new in human friendship, and it may preserve me, God be thanked, from cynicism, if only I extend to it some of that interest which I have already almost

completely squandered down many bye-ways of disillusionment."

It was not so easy at first to maintain my interest, my almost concern, as it had already become, without running the risk of betraying an attitude that must border dangerously upon the offence of curiosity. For there was a certain native subtlety set constantly, an unconscious fortification around the mind of Rebecca, making it proof always against my insinuating attacks. Yet there were times when the look in her eyes would betray her soul to me, but, in the act of looking far, I would suddenly be interrupted, my vision blinded by the ringing flash of her laugh, which, curiously, held at once the qualities of light and sound. Always it would be that way when I seemed to be coming near her soul, for this same jolly laugh would never

fail to come at the end of the long silence she would have maintained throughout the look, as if she, too, had retreated from a possible glimpse of her own soul, just barely succeeding in returning to life, after a perilous moment, through the miracle of her laugh. Sometimes I felt that the great personal concern which had come to her naturally through the affliction of womanhood had superadded the power of a double bondage, for she would be always thinking of her sister. At the end of that long, sad look, which was the accompaniment of her thoughtful moments, perhaps there was another face which reached up to hers for succour and for sympathy.

Then something flashed, with a force that almost startled me, out of her silence, her somewhat mysterious way.

" Rachel is elder than I ! "

I was suddenly, yet perhaps prematurely, jubilant in the hope that this might be the first glimmering of the light breaking through the trees at the end of the dark forest of her soul, and yet upon her return to silence, this word she had said to me only hung a darker curtain around her life, although her innermost self was already separated by many veils from me. And, attempting to puzzle out this speech, I was only the more deeply mystified into further separation. Rebecca still successfully eluded me. Then, somewhere in the midst of much talking, she spoke a few more words which had a ring of significance that reached to my very soul, where it lay quiet and listening, always listening and quiet whenever I talked with Rebecca.

"I'd give anything to see Rachel married."

And, as I looked into the eyes of Rebecca in the peaceful place where she spoke these words, one corner of at least one veil was lifted and I saw something which in this, the excited moment of the discovery, I was much surprised to think had escaped me. Rebecca was not so young, perhaps, as her ringing laugh had led me to believe, and flashing back to me through this new glimpse of her were her very own words—"Rachel is elder than I." Then, somehow, although I had never seen her in the flesh I could see Rachel clearly, a sad-faced, almost hopeless girl, her age exceeding that of Rebecca by even more than the number of years that was between them, a girl whose face and figure stood in urgent need of artifice and

adornment. Led further now even thus timidly, almost, as one might say, half accidentally, my mind went questioning further down the inquisitive byeway it had taken. Somehow, I could not help feeling that the unwedded state of Rachel had, maybe, more than its share in helping to maintain the strange, strong bond which continuously united the separated sisters.

A few days later, as I talked with Rebecca, and while some joke about the question of marriage sprang up between us, she laughed in such a way as I had not hitherto heard her. It was the quality of music again commingled with that of a sudden cloud, as it were, that was full of sorrow falling upon her laugh towards the end of its harmonious scintillation. It expressed for my enlightenment regarding

her something I really wanted to know far more explicitly than if she had said it. It seemed to say, indeed I was very certain that it said :

" Oh, yes ; of course, I would like to be married, and there is one who greatly desires it, but somehow I do not think it would be just the proper thing for me to do—before Rachel, I mean. She's the eldest, and it might frighten her. It might put her against marrying altogether. She might only want to come and live with me, then, and be a kind of second mother to the children."

It was queer how the heartiest ring of her laugh seemed to struggle back, even in spite of me, into this fancy of mine.

II

So much of both of us now flashed continuously before one another in our conversation that I often wondered whether or not I knew her far better than this other man who had asked her to marry him. At least I knew why she was waiting, and perhaps he did not know. And yet, perhaps, it was just the kind of thing she would be telling him, because it was a thing she had not told me, seeing that I had had to tell it to myself. And, although she had never told me, I knew so well that she loved him dearly. Thus was it given more particularly to me to feel for her in my knowledge of all the love that troubled her. She was waiting for the sake of love. If she waited longer she might soon be as old as Rachel now was. And I had seen that Rachel was old—

so old, indeed, as to be now almost past all hope of marriage. She was waiting, waiting, but would the young man, who must now so frequently whisper his love to her, love her as greatly if that day should come or then want to whisper more? . . . I knew that the life of Rebecca was hovering dangerously, and her merry laugh always hung perilously now upon the brink of tears. Although this thought sprang more and more often, it was harder and harder to think of her as some day weeping only. Many little things were coming to show that the crisis of her life was crushing in, and that now she was not waiting nobly, but merely in affright, for the shadow to fall.

For instance, one May evening as I sat in a pleasant garden by the lakeside, I saw Rebecca walking with her lover.

My eye wandered continually from the book I was reading to watch them, yet not in flippant curiosity, but filled rather with a great concern for the ultimate happiness of Rebecca. There seemed to be a constraint upon their movements, and, in spite of myself, I imagined them to be talking of Rachel. Sometimes they stopped dead upon the path, as if arrested and imprisoned in the silence that had come upon them. I knew that Rachel was, for all the bond of love that tied them, becoming more powerfully significant in the life of Rebecca, and maybe, after all I had already thought, towards no happy ending. Then her lover and she sat down upon an old stone seat some distance from me. Their faces were like the faces of people in a cinema picture as they talked on, and the expressions upon

their faces from moment to moment held more meaning for me, than, perhaps, if I could have heard what they were saying. I blessed the inventors of the "silent drama" for having given me the opportunity of acquiring the trick of reading this kind of emotional expression. . . . There passed before me much of the story of which Rebecca was the heroine. . . . But I knew, from the almost pathetic incompleteness of the look upon their faces, that this film-play of a story from real life was still unfinished when the lovers rose to go. Another and perhaps the final reel of the story had still to be unwound before me, and I felt that my interest in it must rise ever higher and higher as it flickered to its end.

However, soon after the passage of the portion I had witnessed in the garden,

came a gap of reality which almost meant to me the spoiling of the whole picture. For a long while, only one figure moved upon the screen, the figure of Rebecca herself, but her very loneliness made her slightest movement full of meaning. It seemed better for the time being that she had already gone some distance out of my life, so that I might see her more clearly in her true relation to herself, and I was watchful now with an almost joyous, vibrant watchfulness, because my eyes were no longer blinded by the magical quality, which flashed out from her laugh when it was gay, or fell down from it, as from a lowering cloud, when it was sad. Perhaps it was because she had so often told me, without any words, that her love had eased her loneliness that she must know how I felt every tremor of her

feelings, and that a meeting between us could only effect an intensification that must end for her in a flood of tears. The gap of uneventfulness in the picture grew at length to possess a certain excitement in the thought that it must soon be filled and, maybe, by a sudden multiplicity of happening. He was gone from her and she was lonely, and what could happen now? He had gone from her because she had waited . . . waited for Rachel to get married first . . . . And Rachel had not married, while she was now as old as Rachel had been when she had begun to wait, just because she had thought that Rachel was getting a little too old, perhaps, for marriage, but still hoped to see her married first. And now Rebecca had lost her lover, and Rachel was still unmarried.

It was a realisation to sigh about and be regretful over. Yet hope remains unlost for ever, and there was something surely, which might again kindle bright in the life of Rebecca. There was her love of Rachel, her sister. . . . It would be very beautiful indeed if ever they came together to part no more. And, somehow, I felt that this must be the ending of the story I had been watching so long in silence upon the screen of my much-concerned fancy.

III

When Rachel came, and I, who had learned to know this hitherto invisible character, I who had almost seen her, too, through very strength of my gazing, was in no wise disappointed. She was old,

so old, when one remembered that she was a girl still and had not married. She was artfully adorned, but not all the trouble she had gone to could hide the finger-marks of Father Time. Soon he must have her by the throat, and then what lingered of her comeliness should be no more. And seeing this—for who that looked could help but see—Rebecca beside her appeared so young even when one remembered that she was still a girl and had not married. This was the immediate first impression, but it began to fade from my mind when I saw the sisters, Rachel and Rebecca, walking in the cool of the evenings, down one or another of the lanes which led past the lake from their little cottage. Their arms would be about one another, and they would be always talking, for there is much that loving sisters may

talk about, even in one of the quiet places of the world. As they came home through the dusk, I often met them, and found it difficult to distinguish Rachel from Rebecca, or Rebecca from Rachel, so alike were they in build, so much did they resemble one another even in almost every feature.

Puzzled about this, my mind sometimes urged itself further down untravelled bye-ways of speculation. I felt that, inevitably, the portion of the lives of the sisters, which had gone to shape the story my mind had made was coming to an end now, and that, henceforth, whatever between them, their lives might make, must only be as little bits of one chapter—their story's ending. And, consequent upon this enforcement of reality by my thought of them, I desired greatly to know at least

a little of what they must be saying to one another out of all the talking they were having now.

So I was glad when they invited me to tea in their quiet cottage by the lakeside, on one of my last evenings in that part of the world. I could not help feeling a sense of clash which would seem to have arisen before I came into the room. The shadow of it was all across the face of Rebecca, more particularly about her eyes, from which tears would seem recently to have fallen, and there was a stillness upon all the movements of the sisters, a frigid reserve upon their words. I could not suddenly detect evidence of the great affection I had been led to believe in, to such an extent that it now almost implicated me. It was disappointing to a distressing degree, but I, who had come

to know so much about the mud of earth, found a certain comfort from this admission to myself of the triumph of reality. . . . The fading of the rose that blossoms from romance only to become of the dust again. The thought began to tremble in my mind that love is sometimes a thing of remoteness, rather than always of intimacy, and does not bear admixture with the grievous quality of real life ; so even the love of the sisters had not been sufficient to conquer the strength of this fundamental affliction. We did not blithely draw into pleasant conversation. It seemed as if we had suddenly been fixed in a new and surprising relation to one another, which possessed almost a sense of pain. We were speaking little because our lives of a sudden had been abridged, as it were, by the thing that had not been done. . . .

It was simply because Rachel had not married, in the first place, and to know why she had not married was not far to seek. The reason flowed sadly from her look at me across the table—she was most pitifully plain-looking. The features of Rebecca, although possessing an indisputable similarity, were still softened by comeliness. This was how I had always seen her, but now, as I looked in the clearer light that was shining around us, I thought that her features were becoming rapidly sharpened into the angularity, the ugliness and oldishness of the features of Rachel. . . . I remembered how I had been unable to distinguish them from one another in the dusk.

Our talk fell downward. There were long silences. Rachel had most to say, as if anxious to maintain some show of

blamelessness. There were moments when she appeared even younger than Rebecca, who would heave a great sigh now and then, and look with a gaze of pitiful wonder into the fire.

I felt almost sorry for having come here, even though I had come to say good-bye. Rebecca rose out of her silence, and, going to the overmantel, gazed long at her own face as she tried to rebuild her hair. Rachel fell silent now, as if compelled by some remembered thought of Rebecca that made her half sorry for what she had just been feeling.

I had come to the ending at long last, and I saw with sorrow that this, of the present, was to be the dominant colour of their lives down the years to be. . . .

I rose quietly, and, with a few poor words of excusing, went out of the cottage by the lakeside, and out of the lives of Rachel and Rebecca.

In the Window

I

She used to be always sitting there in the window. With such remarkable constancy, indeed, did she occupy her position that it seemed as if she might be taken to be a constituent portion of the window, as a structure, a kind of stained glass figure set there in immovable scrutiny in the very middle of Garradrimna.

"Old Nellie Nowlan and she with the two eyes of her, forever set for a squint at a body, whether one would be passing up or passing down."

In this remark, which she continually

compelled, was she fixed in the mind of Garradrimna, just as resolutely as she had fixed herself in the window. Yet there must have been a time, however, far distant, when Nellie Nowlan had been very young. There must have been a time when she had long wavy hair and shining eyes and a laugh that rang like silver on the air. Yet somehow people were not inclined to remember that time, but, in the chill of their forgetfulness, it was the period she herself most fondly remembered.

Here, in this very room where she made dresses for all the women of Garradrimna, she had been a remarkable character in the midst of the other girls with whom she worked. It was here that her personality had developed itself along a certain line. There was something unique about her way of summing a situation ; in her way

of placing a personality or a scene before the mind's eye of others ; in her way of giving a whole chapter of private history through the aptness of a term ; in her gift for coining a nickname. As they sat there at their sewing she would be the first to glance out at a passer-by. His or her significance was at once remarked upon by Nellie Nowlan, for she was, as it were, the interpreter of the little peep-show which was represented by the window.

"Who's that, Nellie?" two or three of them would say, without lifting their heads from the place where they sat humming as they turned their machines. Then Nellie would tell them. Sometimes, a few words would be sufficient to describe the passer-by, but, occasionally, she would laugh in a wise, quiet way as if she knew more.

"Oh, do tell us the story, Nellie!" one of the others would say.

Then their exclamations of invitation and approval would echo as a chorus.

"Nellie is the one can give the fine turn to an account."

"Indeed, you might say she's the one can get well into the mind of a person."

"She's the one can size up a situation, so she can!"

Thus, as the mind of Nellie fed upon their praise, life came to hold for her only a comic significance, and so it was that, as she gazed out of the window in quest of objects of amusement for her sisters, her mind was continually sped by some humorous or satirical impulse. As time went on she developed a slight curl at the corners of her mouth, which showed that her reputation as a critic of manners in

Garradrimna had been justly bestowed. Gradually there arose among the people of the village a certain combative spirit in regard to her. They exhibited their dislike of her as best they might, over invitations to dances and other social gatherings, from which she came to be entirely excluded.

"We don't want to invite people that'll only be taking off things to be grinning about them to-morrow or next day."

In this phrase was embodied the feeling which set the people of Garradrimna in enmity to Nellie Nowlan. In the beginning she had met their offensive with a certain amount of scorn, her criticism often having the effect of completely spoiling a dance. But behind all her manifestations of satirical delight were the beginnings of a certain bitterness that she should be

missing participation in such scenes, which, although slight, perhaps disappointing in themselves, mean much to any girl who is young, as she still was. One or other of the girls with whom she worked often went to a dance to which she had not been invited, and would bring back a full report of everything that had occurred. Very often little things happened of which the participants did not desire publication. And it was through Nellie Nowlan that the most widespread publicity was effected, for there she would be, coming all through the next day, with a wide smile on her face, to gaze after them as they went by the window.

Gradually, the enmity that existed towards her extended to every one of the young men. She effected a fine disdain of all of them, yet, in her secret heart, she

longed many a time for the company and the affection of some one of them. And not so very slowly, and not without a certain sadness in their passing, the years were slipping by.

II

Now and then a girl of her long acquaintance would disappear from the sewing-room, having married, perhaps, a comfortable man, and now and then she would be faced with the amazing miracle of a marriage for love. But no matter what wonderful turn of Fate might be behind it, there was something in the mere fact of any marriage which caused her to survey anew the reality of her own life. Consequently was it that her interest in marriage exceeded all other interests.

Just as soon as the rumour of such an event went abroad she became excited.

Then there occurred the coming of the girl to the sewing-room for her wedding-dress. Nellie, as the forewoman of the establishment, would be called upon to talk the proposed dress over and over with the girl, and, even as she talked, with a gaiety suitable to the occasion, her thoughts crept ever downwards. It was so hard to picture the other suitably arrayed in the proudest moment of womanhood while that moment would seem to be receding from her continually. Thus was she driven to show an abnormal interest in marriage and in the circumstances surrounding it. Her mind became concentrated upon it to a degree that was unhealthy, considering the little bitter turn that mind was presently taking. While

she talked so confidentially to the girls who came for the fine raiment which was to furnish the grandest day of their lives, she flew very near to having a certain hatred for them which caused the twist of her nature to become more pitifully apparent in her daily interpretation of the little peep-show of the window.

From satire, distinguished by a certain amount of humour, this endeavour of her mind became altogether bitter, turning to positive hatred and malevolence when she saw a marriage proposed or achieved, especially when she saw it achieved. This was the spectacle evoking a moment of pride, which cut her to the soul—the girl, married and radiant in the dress she had made for her, going off proudly for the honeymoon with her man. It was then that her tongue claimed its distinction

in the things she said of the newly-married pair. Her harangue would grow bitter and passionate in the glimpse it gave of her own disappointment and her lonely ending. It was the gift of talk she possessed that had brought her to this sad possibility. Yet in the moment of her sorrow it did not become softened in abasement, but, rather, intensified in blind enmity. It was hateful to listen to her as she talked, but the girls in the sewing-room had always the satisfaction of seeing her weep bitterly by way of conclusion to her spell of excitement. The people of Garradrimna were not aware of this, but only of the ugly, obvious side of her character, and knew her only as "ould Nellie Nowlan, the gabster, that bees always running to the window and you passing by."

It was surprising that at this period they should describe her as being old, for, although there was beginning to appear a certain repose even in the twist of her facial muscles towards laughter, she still showed that interest in all goings-on which had made her well hated in Garradrimna. Yet, surely, she was no longer young. She had seen most of the girls of her generation come to this room for their dresses and seen them move down from the chapel on their way to Dublin with their men. All her school-mates were gone, but, even during the course of their passing, there had been something to atone for the offence it appeared against her. There had been glad talk about childish things when they came with their parcels of material to leave the order for their dresses, and, somehow, it had helped

to brighten the darkness that their purpose represented for her. But now a different aspect of all this was appearing. The girls coming to the room were almost unknown to her. They were, for the most part, younger sisters of those girls she had known. Sometimes, they spoke of their nieces. Out of their talk there leaped to the mind of Nellie Nowlan the thought that some of these must be quite big girls now; soon some of them might be coming to this room, even as their mothers before them, her intimates, had come!

III

A terrible sadness came to her as she allowed her mind to dwell on this thought. Its achievement would represent the final disaster of her life, and would be something she could never be able to bear. There

was vast punishment in the very notion of it. Then, suddenly she realised, in a brilliant moment, that she had never tried very hard to win a man. True, her curious attribute had more or less forbade such an endeavour, but the truth was clear that she had never tried. She had merely busied herself as a critic of marriage and all the circumstances surrounding marriage. And yet if she had really set her mind on it, it would have been very easy to have arranged a marriage somehow. Her mother had died and left her the house and this business of dressmaking. Indeed, many a young man who had looked hopefully towards the house had had his hopes finally blasted by suddenly catching sight of her sitting there in the window. If she had happened to live anywhere excepting in the main street,

where the large window of her work-room afforded a finer means of scrutiny than any other house in Garradrimna, many a young man might have come long ago to whisper soft words to her on the doorstep in the twilight of quiet evenings, and she might have gone proudly to the chapel many years since with her man in a lovely wedding-dress she had made for herself, while she could say of herself that she was still young. It was a lovely dress surely. She had given to its production all she knew of the art of decorating the female form until it was a very beautiful thing indeed. And through the long years that it had not been called into use she had continued to decorate it in the lonely evenings after the other girls had gone from the sewing-room. Far into the night she would remain there crying over it,

until the brightness it continually recalled would seem to be not altogether faded from her mind. It might be still possible for her to enter into that state which was her perpetual dream. But it would be hard for her to find a match among the young men of Garradrimna, because there was not a single young man in his generation that she had not "read" from time to time, and her "reading" had been published broadcast. But her mind was sustained by the romantic thought that, some day, a rich, grand, young man might come riding by like a hero out of a story—a stranger from some far place to carry her away.

Now, gradually, a change had come upon the character of her vigil in the window. Although it was no longer one of anxious, critical scrutiny, it was in this

light that it was viewed by the people who went up and down the street, for a reputation once made in Garradrimna was a thing that lasted for ever. The only people who had pity for Nellie Nowlan were the married women who had been her schoolmates.

"Isn't she wearing her age badly, the poor thing?" they would say to one another, as they went past the window. The pity of her ageing became more apparent when people saw her attempting to defeat the years by decking herself out in gaudy dresses. It was said that she wasted her time in making dresses for herself instead of attending to the needs of her customers. They grew into a state of wonderment and perpetual conjecture as to what the future of Nellie Nowlan might be.

Then the miracle she had longed for began to happen. A young man, a shop boy, had come to Garradrimna from some distant town, and taken up a position in the shop just opposite the sitting-room. He was an unusual young man, and he dressed with a splendour which was marvellous considering the grime of the shop and the salary he had come to earn there. It may have been this fact of his sharply contrasted neatness, considering her calling, which attracted her, but his first day in Garradrimna had not advanced many hours when "old Nellie Nowlan" was hopelessly in love with Austin Ivory, which was the young man's name. That day she never left the window. Once or twice, when he came to the door, his roving eye had wandered her way. The result had been a smile, which she

returned with all the graciousness she could summon, a very wonderful smile, indeed, for it held all the yearnings of romance which had been denied fulfilment through the years. After all her weary waiting there had come to her this one wonderful day.

Now Austin Ivory was coming more frequently to the door, and she was calling the other girls in their turns to her side and saying: "Isn't he lovely, musha! isn't he lovely?"

IV

She began to experience a new torment. Her annoyance hitherto, after all, had been merely annoyance, but the thoughts and suspicions which came to her now were as the wounds of some extended form

of torture. She was so fearfully anxious to preserve this promise of admiration which she had fondly fancied in the eyes of Austin Ivory. From the first glance he had thrown towards her she had taken him to be the young man out of a book who was to bring her love. And yet, as she saw him settle into the ways of Garradrimna, an ache that was akin to hunger filled her continually. She knew that the people would be telling him about her and how she had spent her life in talking bitterly. It would be a continual struggle to maintain her innocent charm in his eyes.

Consequently, she was all the more surprised when she saw him come to the door of the shop to smile at her frequently during the glad days. Gradually they had become acquainted, as everyone soon

became acquainted in Garradrimna. . . . Then there came, quite unaccountably, the turning point of her life. The great winter dance was being held in Garradrimna, and, as a mark of appreciation of his entry into their midst, the committee of the dance had made him their secretary. Now, for many a year, they had left her out of the list of the invited because of her reputation, and it was one of the most surprising moments of her life when a complimentary ticket for the dance reached her one fine morning. It was addressed to her by him, in his own grand handwriting.

Later in the day, as she sat there laughing excitedly in the window, she almost fainted when she saw him crossing the street to speak to her. It was about the dance, she knew for certain from the very

first moment she saw him leaving the doorstep. Indeed, himself and herself anyway had the running of it, as you might say, he with his task of selecting those to be invited, and she with the making of dresses for those who were. They were a notable pair surely.

It was grand to hear him talking, not a bit like anyone else she had ever heard speak in Garradrimna, so eloquent, and his talk so full of laughter and loveliness. And it was given to her in this moment to know the crowning joy of her life. She thought at first that he was only joking when he so boldly invited her to accompany him to the dance, but when she saw that he was serious she almost wept for delight. She accepted gladly, all the coyness of her girlhood returning to make her excitement a most joyous

thing to behold. It seemed a most wondrous compensation for all the long, empty years of her yearning. It seemed the very gladdest thing to imagine that he had selected her from all the girls of Garradrimna for this honour.

Yet, for all the incisive and bitter wisdom with which she had probed the causes of things in the village, it was not given her to glimpse the dark workings of Austin Ivory's mind. He had set himself to gain a footing in Garradrimna and to be his own master. He had a few pounds in the Bank, and Nellie Nowlan had a nice house, and a thriving little business, and he might start some other business in conjunction with it, which would help him towards comfort and the realisation of his plans. Of course, a little further down the street was Miss

Diana Deering, who had a public house of her own and a fine way of going on. But he was sufficiently wise to realise that, for the present at least, such an ambition was far beyond him, and he did not wish to waste time upon what might prove, after much striving, to be merely a fruitless endeavour.

Nellie had no thoughts of such things in the days that led up to the dance. Her wisdom, so darkly streaked with experience, had been obliterated by the brightness of her dream. So consumed was she by a great yearning for the moment of triumph the dance represented that she could just barely fetch up strength to turn the machine. She was making a gorgeous dress for the dance, and all the girls said she would look lovely when she came to wear it. But all the time

she could not help wondering what kind of success Diana Deering would make in her new dress.

V

Now, therefore, was she immediately tortured into conflict with this young girl. She looked so young and lovely here in this human show place. Not so herself, poor Nellie Nowlan, who had spent the greater part of her life in turning ugly criticisms of such places off her tongue. She now seemed curiously ashamed of all the bitter things she had said about all the dances that had been held in Garradrimna. Musha! what was there to be bitter about, she now thought with regret—what was there to give so much cause for talk in the few years a girl

knows the summer of her good looks. Herself, maybe, and another girl, with a young man between them, a few moments of pleasure and glad longing, with their accompaniment of a great deal of talk and some sad misgiving. That was life, and it all passed so clearly before her eyes now, all of it that she had missed. She had not entered into the life around her, although that would have been only natural, seeing that it was the life into which she had been born and of which she might have been expected to form a part.

She had set herself up as an uplifted critic of the same life, and that, certainly, was a queer thing to have done. She was beginning to be scorched by her punishment now. . . . Here she was so very lonely now in the very middle of this

room, in the very middle of Garradrimna. He had not taken her out for a dance although he had brought her here. At the other end of the room he was flirting with Diana Deering. Then she saw that glad young couple whirl round and round while she remained so lonely, sitting so stiff and quiet there with no one coming near her at all. It was a fine piece of punishment surely, but Garradrimna knew how to punish well. . . . Yet a few who were not altogether without feeling began to wonder what had brought her here. Surely she might have known that it must be this way with her after all the talk she had had. Why, their mothers had often told them of the way she use to talk of the girls who went to dances. And, just fancy she had the cheek to come here. It was a "charity" to see

her sitting there, a very withered wall-flower indeed. Oh, yes, she must be feeling it now. But why had she come here at all? There were only two people in the room who know this, and these two were herself and Austin Ivory. She had set her eyes on him beyond all the young men she had ever seen, and he had thought of her house as a suitable place of business in which he might eventually become master of Garradrimna. But now he had forgotten both Nellie Nowlan and her house in the light of a larger opportunity. He was giving all his attention to Diana Deering. He never even looked in the direction of Nellie, and all Garradrimna was delighted with him, because he had made himself the instrument of their revenge upon her. Under ordinary circumstances they might

have envied him, but now all wished him success with Diana, and said it would be the grand match indeed !

They never saw her slipping away, but a few girls passing home from the dance saw a light in the sewing-room, and could not resist the temptation to look in through a little hole in the blind. Nellie Nowlan was in there, looking ghastly in the mixture of daylight and candle-light. She was doing a strange thing. She was cutting the dress she had worn at the dance into little strips, and these she was again cutting into smaller pieces, which in turn she was tearing into shreds and burning in the grate. The odour of burning silk filled all the room. It was her sad, symbolic act of renunciation, like something a girl might do before entering a convent. . . . And there was another dress. Oh, God !

There was another dress! It would be harder, surely, to burn that.

A few weeks later, when the little pageant of the wedding of Austin Ivory with Diana Deering went by, there were a great many people watching, not the procession down from the chapel but the window, to see the effect upon Nellie Nowlan. However, she was not in the window, nor was she to be seen later when they went by the window, which was open, talking in high voices of the marriage, so that she might hear.

If only they had known all, the cruelty of Garradrimna might have been fully satisfied, because it was seen and remarked upon that she did not remain working in the sewing room, on that or succeeding evenings, after the other girls had gone.

At length they grew to wonder what

she could have been working at so late for so many years, and why she had abandoned it.

And it remained a mystery.

Encouragement

I

He would always, at that hour, look as one utterly tired by the labour of his day. He would seem indeed to suggest an already overburdened attitude towards things in general, as if the last straw that would break the camel's back was soon to be added to his load. And his appearance seemed further to suggest that it might come in the shape of a day that should hold such a touch of final happening for him as might successfully demolish himself and his reputation for ever from the consciousness of the town. Nevertheless,

he looked always, one might say, at his best, as, on his way, most likely from the "Wild Swan" Theatre, he caught a late 'bus to his suburban home.

"Good-night, Mr. Hallowed!"

"Good-night, good-night, now!"

"And thank you very much for your kind opinion. It is awfully good of you, you know, to be so nice about it."

"Oh, not at all, I assure you, not at all. I am always only too pleased to say a word of congratulation, a word of encouragement to the beginner. We all have to begin, you know."

And with that he was gone.

"All have to begin. . . ."

Somehow, the words seemed to leave a little sense of hurt behind them, as the other repeated them to himself, while

Mr. Hallowed moved tiredly down through the 'bus, the bent back of him suggesting further earnest but weary endeavour, labour in the lamplight, the lonely quality of the midnight oil. . . . Begin, what? What had Mr. Johnston Hallowed ever begun? It was through the difficulty of answering this question that the beginner of the moment would come to feel a little disturbing doubt of Mr. Hallowed. Begin . . . yes, in all probability he had begun, but had he ever finished anything? The beginner would warm himself almost into anger against his congratulator, his encourager, as he stood in reverie of himself, for the most part, watching, but only half seeing, all the coloured 'buses moving down the direction that Mr. Johnston Hallowed's 'bus had gone . . . waiting thus until

he was thoroughly angry with Mr. Hallowed. . . .

Yes, most assuredly, Mr. Hallowed had begun—a most curious career, which was not quite finished. This small, sloping man with the brown beard and bright eyes had an important sense of his own function in life. Other men of the town at this time had set their hearts upon fame in sport or scholarship, or war or politics, or else developed addictions to merely selfish ambitions, but the ambition that had surged up in him seemed to manifest itself only in this tiredness of an evening, this obviously difficult self-consciousness, as of one who had always been bent on doing something, something altruistic maybe—only what was it ?

He fluttered, on the face of it timidly, in pursuit of his function, whatever it was,

about all kinds of scenes that to him were suggestive of the important, the ultimately great, the historically memorable. Many a man or woman belonging to the town, now proud and famous, had a moment of their lives to thank him for greatly, the moment, which should have been treasured by them, when he had stood respectfully, yet still as himself in pursuit of his function, on the outskirts of their first small circles of limelight at the conclusion of their inaugural attempts to create an impression on the world. If only they knew, that is to say, if they still had the modesty to admit it, maybe he had done more to ennoble life as "The Encourager," which was the nickname by which he had come at length to be known, than the best of them. A wag of the town, a clever actor at the "Wild

Swan" Theatre, which was one of the principal places around which Mr. Hallowed hung affectionately, used to tell a story of how "The Encourager" had begun his unusual career by appearing at the wedding of the lady who had jilted him, and extending words of congratulation, words of encouragement to the bridegroom!

Yet, had he ever come even remotely to suggest fulfilment of his magnanimous beginnings? Had he ever showed signs of becoming, so to speak, anything? Along the line, for example, of the Arts to which he would seem to have given all his attention? Was he even a patron of the Arts? No. He had not sufficient money for that, although he had some. A critic of the Arts? Well, one might have required some ability for that, and he

had none. An Artistic enthusiast? Well that would be a matter largely of his soul, and all the soul he had would seem to be in his eyes and in his right hand, that much laboured hand of congratulation. No. He was just an encourager, and you had to take him or leave him at that.

It was not exactly the performance, not the achievement, not even the essential fineness of the thing that had been attempted which mattered to him. It seemed rather to be the personality for the moment of the one who had tried, the young girl who had sung out some of her soul, the actor who had played his part well, the artist who had put the beauty he had seen in some woman's eyes on canvas, the novelist who had added a character or two to his gallery of portraits in his latest book, the playwright, who, at

the fall of the curtain, had been greeted with loud cries of Author! Author! the poet who had just assured him in the street that his latest lyric was the best thing he had done. He would warmly shake the hands of such as these and speak words of congratulation, words of encouragement. Sculpture and those who engaged in it were a little beyond him, but he had a faint, fugitive notion of himself in that relation sometimes, himself at length coming to deserve a commemoration in bronze—for all he had done. He just wanted to be kind. That, he felt honestly, was all he had ever wanted to be.

Thus thinking, he would try to comfort himself whenever doubt came to him. For those upon whom the Goddesses of the Arts bestow their favours soon grow

ungratefully unmindful of such as he. . . . And those to whom failure comes at length become so embedded in their sense of defeat that he could not possibly continue to extend to them his customary function of encouragement. . . . He was thus forced by these circumstances to seek the company of the beginners still . . . wanting always to be there at the right moment, or was it the wrong moment, with the same inoffensive smile upon his face, the same mild, kindly words in his mouth, the same hand that swayed backwards and forwards like a pendulum to grasp theirs . . . did the least encouragement to him make its appearance, so that he might encourage them. . . .

The most considerate of those who had sprung aloft and who, returning after long years, had seen him still about the town

wondered quietly to themselves, without permitting him to see it, why, he had been so content to efface himself. They wondered why he had been satisfied to go on with such an unappreciated performance. Just think of it ! He must surely have shaken the hand of every singer, every player, every novelist, every poet that had ever sprung up in the town and spoken to them his words, his little words of encouragement. . . . A formula indeed, but nicely varied towards the personal touch in each case. . . . A classical performance. . . . A magnificent conception. . . . Reminiscent of the old masters. . . . A remarkable addition to your fine series of regional novels. . . . A terrific last act. . . . Music in every line of it. When the time came, as undoubtedly it would come, in

the course of his lengthy career, and although he knew little about sculpture, he would say very probably to the creator of his own bust in bronze—A very bold conception.

He never seemed to remember, as he said such words, how many thousand times he must have said them, or the words either with which he usually concluded his performance. . . . "I just called around to say these few words," or "I am glad I met you so that I might have the pleasure of saying how much. . . ." "A little bit of encouragement, you know. . . We all have to begin. . . ."

And then he would be gone, as we have seen him go just now after parting with a beginner, who, because of his doubting mood, must have heard, and been convinced by the story, that it must

have been a long time since Mr. Johnston Hallowed had begun. Begun what?

Well, that is just what we have been trying to realise up to the present about Mr. Hallowed.

II

Now, at the same time and in the same town, there was another personage of some importance—in her own estimation, although it always threatened to go further than that. This was Miss Lavinia L'Estrange. Her name, somehow, seemed to suggest an association with some kind of stage that might have existed at some time. But, however plausible that might appear as an imagination of her far-back past, there could not possibly be any reality

in it now. A glance was sufficient to tell that stages of any sort were beyond her at the moment. Yet she had, somehow, the grand manner of an actress who had performed, who might still be performing, after the fashion of the long resting actress, in the town. Her occupation at present was more or less confined to theatres, but only to the outsides of theatres, as it were, the approaches to theatres, the surrounding premises of theatres. Her performance, had very definitely narrowed down to this particular sphere and that was one reason why people were sometimes confounded into the mistake of regarding her as being once connected with the stage, for, it was fairly well known that, like Mr. Johnston Hallowed, she had, at one time, swept a somewhat wider field of fame. She had

been an enormous collector of acquaintances. She had made a feature of a somewhat distant intimacy with the great, at least those whom she, from time to time, had regarded as being socially great. Never hoping to be altogether of society, she had managed, more or less successfully, to identify herself with it. She too had oft times shaken hands with the prominent. There were photographs still to be seen in old newspaper files to show that she had once participated in notable scenes. She had had a great weakness for photographs. Not, indeed that she was particularly successful as a photographic subject, for always, in any published group whatsoever which included her, there was just a suggestion that, at the last moment, she had been merely pushed into the photograph from behind. And, always,

this suggestion seemed to betray a sense of her desire to shrink out of the scene, which was rather a disguise of her real quality. For she had managed successfully to run up and down the list of the whole of them, the most distinguished personages belonging to the highest society of the town, the nobility and gentry of the country, the racing people, the hunting people, the golf people, the tennis people, the celebrity artistes of the concerts, the star performers at the different theatres, the artists of the Academy and the connoisseurs, real or imaginary, who appeared there with such regularity, year after year, on the opening day.

She seemed to be inseparable from the company of such as these, and, although she seemed to be omnipresent in all scenes wherein they figured, she held an indefinable

sense also as of being beyond them. You never seemed to know where you stood with her. . . . When the people whom we have just glanced at, stood in groups waiting, always, to be photographed against the background of suitable surroundings, she had a way of descending. She was known to give quite distinguished people quite a fright when they saw her thus descending upon them, for she had such a method of descending! Indeed, for the possession of just this very quality, even people from whom one might have expected better had nicknamed her "The Discourager." And she had a way, in addition to it, a little disquieting way of being supercilious. There was always just the barest suspicion in the would-be timid, shrinking way in which she looked at them as she appeared upon the outskirts

of a group, just before the photograph was taken, that she was what they believed her to be. . . .

Thus had arisen, by cumulative regard, the definite establishment of her as " The Discourager." It came at length to be stated that even the threat of an encounter with her would put years on you. Thus arrived her moment of power and personality of which she, quite naturally, began to take advantage.

A certain practice with regard to her became current. Notable people in their different spheres had begun to buy off her pressing presence around them with photographs, already taken, and autographs held in readiness about their persons. It was very well worth it, many people said, if such purchases of her interest in them only kept her from

descending at inopportune moments in their careers. And thus she came at length to be established in another kind of notability than that which she may have originally intended. She was now known as the most relentless collector of this kind of celebrity souvenir in the town.

In the course of things it was meet that "The Encourager" and "The Discourager," in pursuit of their somewhat similar functions, should at length come to impinge upon one another. It seemed indeed, in the way it happened eventually, that they had merely been moving all the time in gradually converging circles of activity towards inevitable coincidence. And this consummation was destined to come, most suitably too, of all places, in the "Wild Swan" Theatre.

III

"The Encourager" had come for curious reasons to concentrate almost solely upon this place. It was out of it or in it, or from, somehow, around it, that he felt, even belatedly, his final justification must come. For, as the years began to hurry past him now he had begun to feel an ever increasing sense of the neglect that had befallen him. . . . When he thought of how some of those whose hands he had shaken, just casually sometimes, more often from the mere force of habit that had grown upon him, mostly, however, without any deep sense of conviction as to their futures, had passed so far beyond him. Big biographies had been written about them, and, when he read such works he realised in sadness how all remembrance of his kindly face in

far-back moments of their beginnings must, so soon, have faded from their minds, for there was never the slightest hint, amid all their lavish remembrance of themselves, of any of the little incidents that had included him. Not even, as had happened frequently, when they had taken it into their own hands and written their autobiographies, such exhaustive accounts of themselves, recounting their early struggles, their splendid, determined attempts to succeed, the worthy and well-to-be-recorded acumen of those who had first recognised their genius. Pages full of names of critics and appreciators, with extracts from their notices, and letters often in full, but not a line of what he had said to them, not a word about him. . . . Of course, he never found a word about Miss Lavinia L'Estrange either, but he

was quite certain that she must be the proud possessor of autographs and photographs of those who had been written about, or who had written thus about themselves. . . . He had not salvaged even so much as that from the wreck of his career of encouragement. No remembrance at all. And since they never remembered him it was scarcely possible, even as they had spoken to him, so full had been their minds always of crowded, anxious thoughts of themselves that they could have had a glimpse of the secret that was his, his desperate longing for recognition, for, at length, remembrance. It was realisation of this neglect that now so deeply hurt him, tortured him into a full sense of his own failure. No doubt all those now so proud and notable had merely thought the worst of him . . .

although they must have had the most horrid thoughts of Miss Lavinia L'Estrange. But where was the use in thinking of that when she had succeeded, even if only to the extent that he realised, and he had tried only to fail completely? This rubbing shoulders with the Arts, for sake of what? Where had it landed him? Ah, where? At the necessity merely of remembrance of himself. But if he were to write a book? What a deliverance of himself into the hands of his enemies that must be?

What could he recount, what remember? His first and last appearance as a singer had been at an insignificant concert, in aid of some local charity of which he had headed the list of subscriptions. He had not been given an encore. No, not even the faintest suggestion of an encore. Then, forced

by this first failure, into a dramatic society, he was cast for the part of a character who had to make a short yet momentous announcement about the hero, but, after the intense labour of much rehearsing, he had forgotten the single speech of his part, or missed his cue or done something equally disastrous to his hopes of the stage. And there was the little drawing he had done. Well, his friends, remembering, as a way out of their difficulty, an attitude of Whistler, used to say it was " very, very nice." He never quite realised the true inwardness of the remark until at length he found the explanation in a book upon Whistler. And then he saw that what they meant simply was that his work was awful, how awful he was always afraid fully to realise. But still, without disillusion, he passed on to his *magnum*

opus, his Tragedy in Five Acts. After he had spent years on it, and being so confident of its success that he wrote it out, from start to finish, twenty-three times, the things that the Director of the "Wild Swan" Theatre had said in his letter, the sarcastical mood of advice to a beginner in which it was couched. It was not alone the things the letter said, but the things it suggested! As a matter of fact he had the letter still, now fading in company with the returned manuscript that had never gone away any more, and, whenever he wished to be reminded of how unkind the Arts had been to him, he took out the letter and read it over and over again. . . . Just imagine how the sarcasm of the Director had stuck in him all these years!

Could anyone possibly imagine a book

about all that? A book of his reminiscences about the famous people he had met, possibly, but that must of necessity include something about himself. After all it was he, himself, who had met them. . . . Himself, just now, when people were springing up in the town who were sufficiently profane as to regard him, "The Encourager," (for he had become conscious of his nickname and not a little proud of it) as a bore, if not a positive affliction! There seemed imminent danger that the nature of his performance might soon coincide with that of Miss Lavinia L'Estrange, and he himself come to be regarded as taking her place almost, if not completely, as "The Discourager." What an awful thought? He knew it. He felt it. The blight of ingratitude had fallen down upon his career, for he believed

he had dignified it into the standing of a career, as "The Encourager." He had observed people aforetime escape from the descent of Miss Lavinia L'Estrange, and now he was seeing the very same thing happen to himself, while she was being permitted to enter so that she might receive the photographs and the autographs which were waiting for her, while he was not permitted to enter to say his few words. . . . His performance had worn so thin that he was considered really not worth the trouble of a few minutes conversation. It may have been because of the queer and quite unaccountable sense of shrinking that had come into the hand that he extended now only to clasp the air. . . . The once famous hand that had been actually credited with corns through excessive hand-shaking.

. . . He felt that, somehow, there must be something more attractive about the present performance of Miss Lavinia L'Estrange. And there was.

She had adjusted herself to the passage of time. She had compromised with her conception of a career—if she had ever had one. After all, she had met sufficient great people, appeared half in, half out, of quite as many distinguished groups, maybe, as she had desired, had all the photographs and autographs of the really Great which she could well hope to get now. . . . But she wanted to go on. . . . There was always behind her the momentum which had carried her, apparently at the last moment, into so many groups that had appeared in the newspapers. And now it had pushed her into Mr. Johnston Hallowed's preserve . . . into the ground

over which he had paced backwards and forwards through the years. After all, she had made herself of some importance. She had been seen in photographs with the great, with some of those at the very top of the tree, and those who now aspiring remembered this, were pleased in their vanity by her effusive requests for autographs and photographs from them.

The more unfledged they were, the more merely beginners, the less could they have refused her. Why, the very notion of association with her, not to speak of inclusion in the long gallery of portraits she must surely possess, was, of itself, almost a swing at once into fame.

Thus had the " great " of Miss Lavinia L'Estrange served her now in her declining hour while the " great " of Mr. Johnston Hallowed had utterly forsaken

him. She was indeed to him almost of that company, a " great " woman because she, after a fashion, kept, but still kept, her position in the eyes of the town. For she suggested, although indefinably, a sense of mystery and mastery, as if she had the whole thing in the hollow of her hand, a kind of female Pepys, an observer, a critic, a commentator, a collector of memorabilia, but, nevertheless, not wholly unrelated to the scenes in which he laboured with such persistence. Indeed, she was rapidly establishing herself as an Encourager. All doors were opened to her. Her name rang in and out of the pleasant conversations of those who were at the beginning of their hopes and dreams.

It was indeed the most painful happening to Mr. Johnston Hallowed so far, to observe how he was being superseded

in no uncertain manner by Miss Lavinia L'Estrange. But even at this late stage and, despite the troubled condition of his mind, he was making belated attempts to recover himself, beginning to do what was at best a fantastic thing with the little means that were left him at this time. And his endeavour took the particular line along which he had begun to feel the deepest sense of defeat. It was, he felt, the artists, the fellows with the paintings and drawings, who had turned him down most thoroughly. For even on the rare occasions upon which he was now permitted entrance to their studios they looked at him more ferociously than, he thought, was even necessary, as they stood before their canvasses, and he was really afraid of his life to say anything at all, not to mention the thought of his customary few words. . . .

At openings of the Academy they brushed past him in pursuit of the notable people who had come to look at their pictures, and he scarcely dared to glance at how they would manage to stop, or *she* would manage to stop them, to say a few words to Miss Lavinia L'Estrange.

And thought of the long-lost sculpture of himself fell further and further out of his mind.

But it was out of his mood regarding the artists that there came at length to be born his idea of revenge—revenge upon himself or upon them, he knew not which it was ; but that did not seem to matter.

IV

Starting with small and cheap ones, he began to buy the pictures of the artists,

typical examples of their work generally, for sake of his own interest in them and their, in a great many cases remote, possibilities of fame, but for the most part portraits of those who were now springing up in the town and whom the artists considered worthy of invitation to sit for their portraits. It was all simply the result of the fact that they had never considered him worthy as a subject. But maybe now . . . maybe later. . . .

There were wild moments when thoughts of his bust in bronze swam back to him again from out a haze of tortured recollection.

There were plenty of artists and plenty of celebrated or pseudo-celebrated people. Indeed many of the latter now began to look to him hopefully. These were cases in which the Encourager of the moment,

Miss Lavinia L'Estrange, had not, so far, sought them out as subjects for photographs and autographs.

After all, as he was beginning to see, it was only a new way of setting out to do a very old thing. And although he would frequently send one of his encouraged artists on the track of such a one he had a notion, somehow, that it was mad all the same. Even the satisfaction of granting the request to show his already rapidly growing collection to those who desired inclusion in it was beginning to be not a little wearisome. In the face of his dwindling resources he sometimes felt that he was purchasing the revival of opportunity to perform his function just a little too dearly. It needed a lot of sticking, this second phase of the same performance that he was now attempting. He was

getting just a little weary of himself as The Encourager, if not merely the shadow of "The Encourager" once more. At the end almost, he was still in the position of a beginner, like those upon whom he had spent his life. He now seemed to himself sorely to need words of encouragement to go on, from some Encourager who would not come, so that he might perform the feat of encouragement!

Indeed it was apparent to the doorkeepers at the "Wild Swan" Theatre, where he still went, that he was no longer the man he had been.

For example, one evening that the appearance of Mr. Hallowed at the Theatre had coincided with that of Miss L'Estrange, Jimmy was saying to Johnnie:

"... Looks like as if he was ruined by a woman or something, with that kind of

dreepy expression always on his face now."

"The way he used to run after certain classes shaking hands."

"Aye . . . actually putting corns on his hands. That was a good one."

"Now there's always parties looking for him. Artist fellows like, and sometimes you'd imagine he doesn't want to see them at all. I suppose they're all doing him down?"

"They shaking hands with him, instead of he shaking hands with them, I wonder is that it?"

"You'd imagine it was only for that depressed look of him always."

"There, look at 'The Discourager,' Miss L'Estrange. Will you take notice of the whet she has under her!"

"They were always a sort of enemies, I think, anyway."

"Infringing on one another's preserves like. Boring people stiff, if they only knew."

"We could tell them both something. Things we've heard people say about the both of them from time to time."

There were only the four of them together in the vestibule now, the doorkeepers, Jimmy and Johnnie, and Mr. Johnston Hallowed and Miss Lavinia L'Estrange. . . .

Miss L'Estrange, in the moments when she was not beaming upon the undisconcerted doorkeepers, walked up and down, with her face somewhat averted from the direction of Mr. Hallowed, looking at the paintings on the walls. Mr. Hallowed, on the other side, had his back quite turned, as he stood with his hands behind him looking at the pictures on the opposite wall. . . .

Both were waiting as it were for someone to come out from the stalls between the acts of the first production of the new play which was proceeding. Mr. Hallowed with dwindling feelings of expectation, because, most likely, certain people in the stalls were more anxious to meet him.

"Some of them artists doing him in over an ould picther again, a commission for a picther of this new author fellow. Curious, how he doesn't seem to care about plays even now at all," said Jimmy to Johnnie.

"What's *she* waiting for, I wonder?"

"She's waiting for the author of course to ketch him, when he goes round to the stage to take his curtain, and get his autograph. She feels it's better for her to miss the play than to miss him. *He*

has a sort of notion that by missing the play he may miss the artist that is after him for the commission, but he has to come around the Theatre every night just the same as a drunkard has to go into public houses long after he's taken the pledge for life.

Suddenly, Johnnie and Jimmy saw Mr. Hallowed and Miss L'Estrange turn simultaneously and face one another directly upon opposite sides of the vestibule. It was a most exciting moment.

From her dancing eyes behind her glasses they could see that she was just on the point of doing or saying something. Then it happened. There, before the eyes of the doorkeepers, Miss L'Estrange had descended upon Mr. Hallowed and his hand had moved automatically to encourage her to begin her discouragement,

for that, in his rather desolate mood of the moment, was what he guessed to himself it was going to be.

" Mr. Hallowed, really, I never thought of it before, but I absolutely must have your autograph, and your photograph. You'd never be so good, I suppose, as to give me your photograph as well."

He was quite amazed. Such a request he had never dreamt of. He mumbled words of response as his free hand fumbled confusedly with his brown beard. He was all flurried by pleasant astonishment. He had been recognised at last . . . and, of all people, by Miss Lavinia L'Estrange. Through a haze of gladness that was like music, he again heard the words :—

" Won't you be so good, Mr. Hallowed, as to give me your autograph ? I should have had it years ago, I know, but you

have been so retiring sometimes, so busy at others, that I never could catch you."

"Yes, of course . . . of course . . . . And if you'd like a photograph . . . or a small portrait . . . or a . . ." He was going to say "bust in bronze," but he had succeeded in checking himself just barely in time.

"The small portrait. Oh how lovely! How sweet of you!"

He had been recognised at last, and the haze of delight deepened around him as he heard her further words.

"A great Encourager of the Arts, to be sure, like yourself, Mr. Hallowed. No. I could not be content with a photograph!"

He resolved immediately to go the whole length of his purpose and to present her with the fulness of himself as he had seen it earlier—The Bust in Bronze. After

all, who had a better right to have it, to have him ?

It was apparent to the doorkeepers that there was a tremendous excitement upon both of them . . . and they nudged one another in delightful anticipation of what they expected would be its end.

Some of his ancient, well-known gesture had returned to Mr. Johnston Hallowed, for he was not to be found wanting of himself now that real recognition had come to him even at this late stage.

Already he was saying the most complimentary, the most encouraging things about Miss L'Estrange's collection of autographs. And there was borne in upon her too, the fact that she had never met with anything like this before. . . . This wholehearted appreciation where, heretofore, she had been met only with suspicion.

No one, save herself, knew how really tragic it had been for her. She had gone on collecting purely worthless people, merely that she might not decline in her own estimation, from the "great" days when she had been so very near the really celebrated. . . . There was, to her, an ironic ring in the sound of Mr. Johnston Hallowed's words of encouragement. But if he thought that he was going to get the better of her!

Encouragement of her, imagine, who had so long ceased to begin! Why, he was the real beginner! He had always been beginning. Think of him beginning now to make an absolute fool of himself, spending his little money commissioning painters to do portraits of people who were well satisfied to give her photographs of themselves for nothing, and surely that

was sufficient when you thought of the mere impudence of most of them!

The mood of jealousy seemed still to be as strong as ever between them, but at last it was showing signs of breaking down. She was thinking that if only she could stop him from spending his money by doing something. . . . Anything. . . . He was a nice man, really, and she had photographs of all the people of whom he was getting paintings done, and she could still get for him any likeness he might require, before all his money was gone fruitlessly upon the end of his quest, while all that remained of the rest of it was remembrance of the forgetfulness of those who had become great and the feel of the corns upon his hands.

The words "collection," "your collection," "my collection" "my collection,"

" your collection " sounded all over their excited conversation. Even now that the portion of the audience resting between the acts of the play had returned to the stalls and now too that they had forgotten all about the author, a most unknown young man who had been hanging around hopefully waiting to be approached by either of them, only to be completely disappointed, unencouraged to further playwriting by any request for a photograph or an autograph or a promise of sitting for a portrait !

As he went back to join the audience and to look disconsolately at his own play, he momentarily considered himself the most unlucky author who had ever written a play for the " Wild Swan " Theatre and the doorkeepers, Jimmy and Johnnie, pitied him accordingly.

"The Encourager" talked on in a highly excited, nervous way to "The Discourager," his hands waving about him and almost, but not at any time quite clasping her or gathering her into his arms. "The Discourager" beamed and beamed upon "The Encourager" until almost it appeared as if her glasses might be shattered by the extreme warmth of her regard of him. They stood there more terribly interested in one another than anyone had ever been in either of them. They were beyond encouragement or discouragement save of one another.

The situation was now exceedingly disconcerting for Jimmy and Johnnie, and they found themselves wishing that the performance of the play was over, so that they could clear the vestibule of the pair.

"I wonder will they start hunting in couples now?" said Jimmy.

"That would be the devil entirely," said Johnny.

"No, she'll put a stop to him and he'll put a stop to her. They'll stay at home forever and nothing will be heard of them ever again."

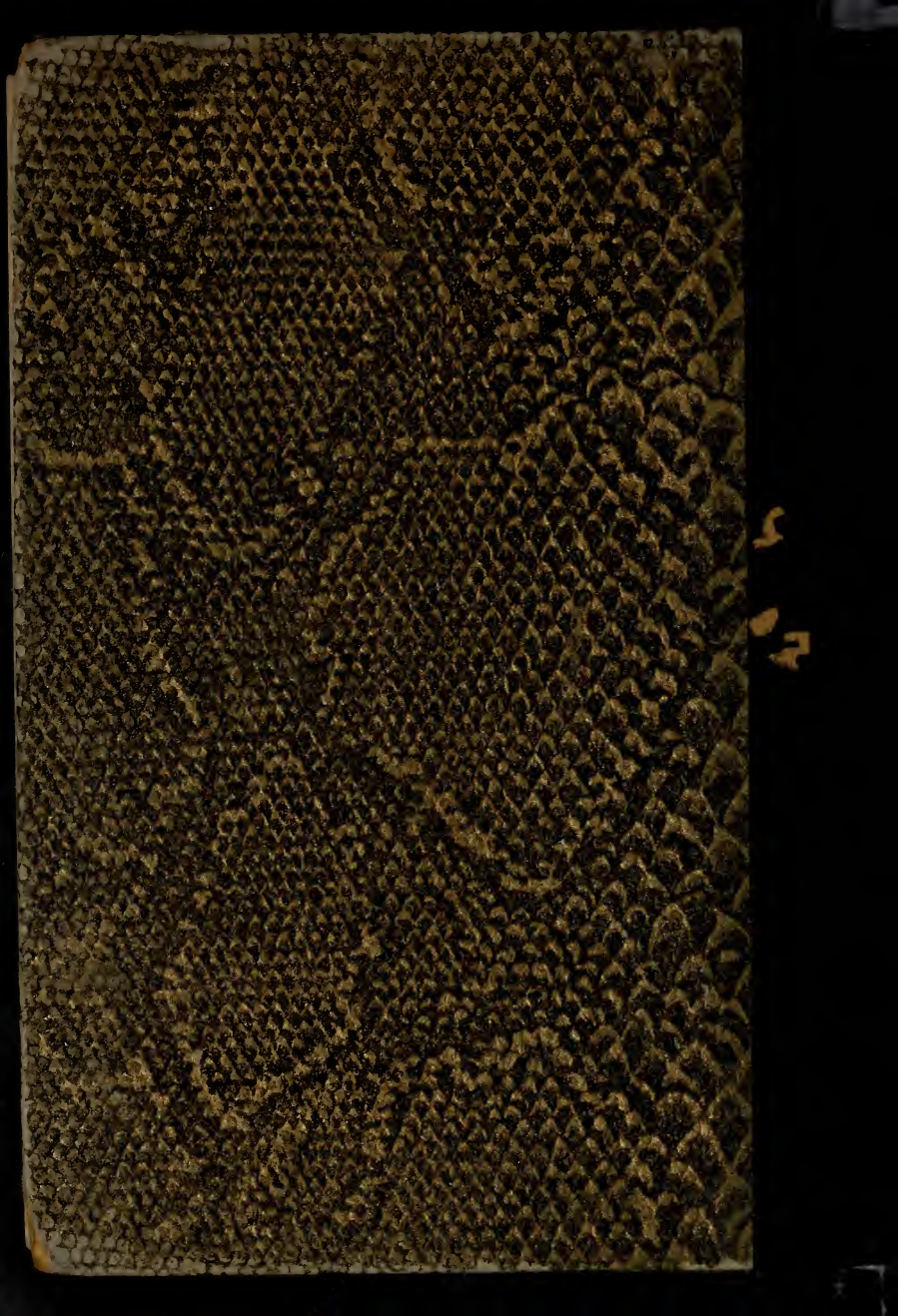
"How do you mean?"

"It's not they that'll be married at all, but them autographs and yokes of theirs that'll be mixed up together in the same house, and they'll be as jealous of one another as blazes, although they'll be one and the same thing, d'ye know, and they'll be always remembering the time they weren't, and they'll be so busy playing hell with one another that they won't have time to come out annoying people any more."

"There's the bell for the last curtain," said Jimmy. "We can soon clear them now."

"And you can take it from me that from the looks of them, I'd say we're nearly finished with them for good. What I said is going to happen. Look at them now! They don't know where they are!"

Jimmy had pulled back the door, and the crowd, pouring out of the Theatre carried "The Encourager" and "The Discourager" before it as a flood will easily carry uprooted things.

The last man to leave the Theatre was the author wondering what had happened to himself. It seemed that some portion of the world he had hoped to enter had slipped away.

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